Department of Public Works
House Sewer – General Information

What is a Sanitary Sewer System?

The term "sanitary sewer" refers to sewer pipes that carry wastewater from your indoor plumbing, including sinks, clothes and dish washers, and bathrooms. There are three separate piping systems: the sewer systems, the drinking water system, and the storm drain system that carries away rain water. These three systems are separate from one another both physically and legally for public health reasons.

How Pasadena's Sewer System Works

- Wastewater in your house is collected in your interior plumbing pipes, which converge into one pipe just outside of your house. This one pipe is your "house" sewer pipe.
- The "house" sewer pipe carries the sewage from your house to a City sewer main, which is usually located in the middle of the street.
- A city sewer main carries sewage from the City sewer system, and connects to a trunk sewer under the jurisdiction of Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County (LACSD).
- The LACSD trunk sewers carry the sewage to a County Sanitation District treatment plant outside the City, where it is treated.

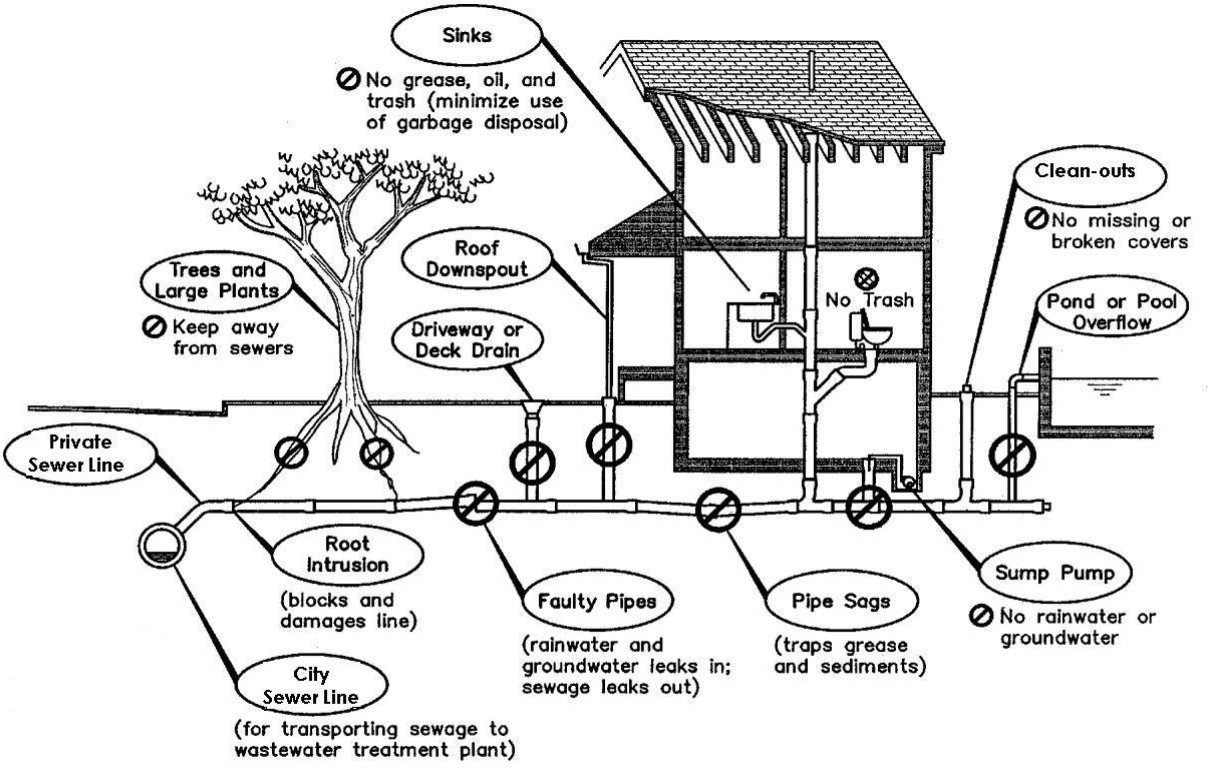
Responsibility of the Property Owner

In accordance with Chapter 13.24.610 of the Pasadena Municipal Code,"…. all house sewers and appurtenances thereto, now existing or hereafter constructed, shall be maintained by the owner of the property served in a safe and sanitary condition, and all devices or safeguards which are required by this chapter for the operation thereof shall be maintained in good working order." The City of Pasadena is responsible for the maintenance of the City sewer mains.

Please be aware that the private "house sewer" extends beyond the property line into the public street. A house sewer is defined as part of the horizontal piping beginning 24 inches

from the exterior wall of the building or structure and extending to its connection with the City sewer line.

House Sewer – General Information (Continued)



Help Prevent Sewage Spills!

Keep grease, trash, rainwater and roots out of our sewer system!!

Sewer Blockages

- Sewer blockages can occur in your fixtures, in your interior plumbing pipes, or in your house sewer. Only very rarely is a problem caused by a blockage in the city system. When a blockage happens in the city system, the entire neighborhood can be affected.
- If a blockage is suspected, you should check your fixtures and your house sewer pipe. If you don't know how to do this, call a plumber for assistance.
- Common causes of blockages in the house sewer are roots in the pipe or grease build-up. A root cutting machine is used to clear a root blockage; and grease is usually removed with a plumber's snake.

House Sewer – General Information (Continued)

Preventive Maintenance of House Sewers

- Have your house sewer cleaned and inspected annually.
- Avoid planting trees and shrubs directly over or near your house sewer. Certain plants have roots that are especially hard on the sewer. Examples are Poplar, Willow, Elm, Ash, Birch, Sycamore, Maple, Cottonwood, Russian Olive, Apple, Pear, Lilac, Honeysuckle, and Chokecherry.
- Avoid pouring grease, oil, lard, or similar materials into the sewer pipes. Once the grease cools, it solidifies and sticks to the walls of the pipe. These types of materials should be poured and stored in grease cans and disposed of properly.
- Except for toilet paper designed for the sewer system, avoid putting paper products into the sewer system, such as acne pads, feminine products, or baby wipes, which do not break down like toilet paper and therefore can cause blockages.
- Avoid letting hair into the system. Hair traps can be used in bathtubs and showers drains.
- Limit the materials that go into your garbage disposal. Anything that is too hard for your garbage disposal to break up, such as egg shells and fish bones, should be discarded in the trash and not in the pipes.
- Make sure cleaning cloths, diapers, and trash do not get into your pipes through the toilet.

FAQ's about Sanitary Sewer Systems

- Can I connect my patio drain, roof gutter downspout, pond/pool overflow drain or footing drain to any type of sanitary sewer line including my house sewer?
    - No, according to the Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC), it is illegal and punishable.
- Where can I legally drain surface water from my house to?
    - You can legally drain water towards the street or even connect to an existing storm drain for a fee.
- Can I drain pool water into the street?
    - Allowing pool water to be drained into the street is determined on a case by case basis. Please contact the Department of Public Works, Engineering Division, at pw-permits@cityofpasadena.net.
- If my street is flooded, can I remove a manhole cover in order to help the water drain more quickly?
    - No. According to PMC, it is illegal to open or enter a manhole for any reason.
- Where can I find City of Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC)?
    - It is available online at http://ordlink.com/codes/pasadena/index.htm?Search_Code=Begin+Searching+Municipal+Code
    - Or you can contact the City Clerk's Office at (626) 744-4124.

House Sewer – General Information (Continued)

- What if I see sewage coming up from the manhole?
    - Keep people and pets away from the affected area. Untreated wastewater has high levels of viruses and bacteria.
    - Report the incident at: https://www.cityofpasadena.net/citizen-service-center/ or 626-744-7311.

Sanitary Sewer Overflows

Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSO) is the term used when wastewater is discharged from a sewer system through a manhole, cleanout or broken pipe. SSO can cause health hazards; damage to homes and businesses; and threaten the environment, local waterways, and beaches. The City of Pasadena ensures that all sewer main lines are in good working condition by cleaning them on an annual basis. In addition, citywide television inspections are performed to inspect all pipes. For further questions please feel free to contact the Citizen Service Center at: https://www.cityofpasadena.net/citizen-service-center/ or 626-744-7311.

Cesspool or Septic Tank

- Cesspools and septic tanks are underground tanks on private property that connect to a house sewer system. The tanks are not connected to the city sewer system, instead, water is released into the ground through buried leach line pipes. If you are unsure if you have a septic tank, or are connected to the City sewer system, information is available online at: https://www.cityofpasadena.net/public-works/engineering-and-construction/engineering/. You can also contact Department of Public Works at pw-permits@cityofpasadena.net.
- If you have a problem with a septic tank, it is suggested that you call a plumber with septic tank experience.
- If you have an existing septic tank, and are interested in connecting to the City sewer, please contact the Department of Public Works at pw-permits@cityofpasadena.net.
- Installation of new septic tanks is prohibited under most circumstances.